

PHI 388: God and the Good Life
Spring 2011
Rowlett 248 11:00-12:15
CRN 24077 (3hrs.)

Instructor: Dr. Mike Austin

Office Hours: Case Annex 260; MWF 11:15-12:05; T/Th 2:00-3:15

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Course Overview

The central question to be explored in this course is “*Do we need God for the good life?*” Answering this question will involve thinking about a variety of other topics, including issues related to God’s existence or non-existence, human nature, human fulfillment, moral development, and ethics. These issues will all be addressed as they relate to the central question of the course by looking at what some prominent intellectuals have thought about them. The goal is for the student to develop (or more fully develop) his or her own answer to this question.

Initially, it might seem that the course question only allows for two answers, either yes or no. However, a variety of answers have been given which this course will explore. Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Søren Kierkegaard all answer the question in the affirmative, but Aristotle thinks we need God merely as an object of contemplation. Aquinas and Kierkegaard both think we need friendship with God. Aquinas thinks we enter this relationship through a rational faith, whereas Kierkegaard thinks faith is less rational. Friedrich Nietzsche claims that we do not need God to be fulfilled, and that those of us who are able must try to be great without God, because in his view God does not exist. Contemporary philosopher Erik Wielenberg agrees that God does not exist, and argues that we do not need God for the good life because we can be good and unselfish without God. This course will draw from the insights of thinkers in philosophy, religion, biology, history, and literature in order to encourage students to think about this question in a deep way.

Texts

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2d. edition (Hackett, 2000)

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/>

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006)

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/tolstoy/ivan.toc.html>

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Hackett, 1998).

Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005)

General Education Goals and the Course

Students will be able to:

-Use appropriate methods of critical thinking and quantitative reasoning to examine issues and to identify solutions. (Goal two)

- Analyze the values, cultural context, and aesthetic qualities of artistic, literary, philosophic, and/or religious works. (Goal six)
- Distinguish the methods that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, natural sciences, history, and social and behavioral sciences. (Goal seven)
- Integrate knowledge that will deepen their understanding of, and will inform their own choices about, issues of personal and public importance. (Goal eight)

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete HON 308/PHI 388 will:

- Demonstrate the ability to gather, synthesize, and critically analyze information and present it in a well-written format.
- Demonstrate understanding of the different answers to the course question and their relationship to other areas of human concern.
- Verbally articulate complex information in an interesting presentation regarding one of the answers to the course questions studied in the course.
- Develop more fully their own answers to questions related to the God, ethics, and human fulfillment.

Course Format

Class time will include lecture, discussion, and small group work. Each student is expected to do all of the assigned reading, so that class discussion is fruitful and worthwhile.

Student Responsibilities and Course Policies

1. Last day to drop is 1-18-2010.
2. I do not take attendance, but if you fail to attend your grade will show this, as you'll miss in-class assignments, and the points raised in discussion that show up on tests. Plus, some of the reading is dense, and you will need to be in class to begin to grasp it.
3. *Academic integrity statement:*

Students are advised that EKU's Academic Integrity policy will strictly be enforced in this course. The Academic Integrity policy is available at www.academicintegrity.eku.edu. Questions regarding the policy may be directed to the Office of Academic Integrity.

4. Disability Statement:

If you are registered with the Office of Services for Individuals with **Disabilities**, please obtain your **accommodation letters from the OSID** and present them to the course instructor to discuss any academic accommodations you need. If you believe you need accommodation and are not registered with the OSID, please contact the Office in the Student Services Building Room 361 by email at disserv@eku.edu or by telephone at (859) 622-2933 V/TDD. Upon individual request, this syllabus can be made available in an alternative format.

5. Read.

6. Tests may not be taken at a time other than when they are scheduled, unless prior arrangements have been made with me.

7. Out of respect for me and other students, don't text or talk on the phone during class.
8. Late assignments will be penalized, and no work is accepted after the final class period prior to finals week.

Course Requirements and Grading

Discussion Forum and In-Class Exercises (10%): To provide motivation for staying up with the reading as well as prepare you for class discussion, you'll be required to answer a few questions on the reading each week via the Blackboard Discussion forum, and this will form the basis for some of class discussion. There will also be occasional in-class informal writing.

Exams (20% each): There will be a midterm and a final exam, consisting of essay questions.

Website (20%): The website that the class produces will be developed by the students in the course. I will assign a small group of students to each of the individual thinkers we discuss, and that group will produce a portion of the website devoted to the ideas of the individual your group is to cover. This will include a brief presentation of your portion of the site to the class.

Paper (30%): You will write one 6-8 page paper, which will be a statement and defense of your own answer to the course question.

Course Outline (subject to change as needed)

Week 1: Course Introduction; Reading Books and the Good Life

Week 2: Tolstoy; Aristotle

Week 3: Aristotle

Week 4: Aristotle

Week 5: Aquinas

Week 6: Aquinas

Week 7: Aquinas/**Midterm Exam Thursday Feb. 25th**

Week 8: Nietzsche

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: Nietzsche/Neuroscience

Week 11: Kierkegaard

Week 12: Kierkegaard

Week 13: Wielenberg Introduction and ch. 1

Week 14: Wielenberg ch. 2-3

Week 15: Wielenberg chs. 4-5

Week 16: Website Presentations; Course Conclusion; Review for final exam

Final Exam Tuesday May 4th, 8:00am-10:00am

This course is being developed through the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this course do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.